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ABSTRACT

The modeling theory of aggressive behavior being promoted by violence on television points to more serious implications, that is, the molding of a national consciousness laden with 19th century values and stereotypical characterizations of reality. Since students are not taught how to watch television, they use it as a perception of reality. Because commercial television tries to please all people all the time, it finds the lowest common denominator. It portrays people in overgeneralized stereotypical and unreal ways. We must recognize that television offers a variety of products and we must educate the television consumer on how to choose these products, particularly the children, who learn from it early in their lives. (Author/DAG)

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TV STEREOTYPING:

"How To Keep 'em Down on the Farm"

N. Ferris Top

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TV STEREOTYPING:

How To Keep 'em Down on the Farm

N.F.T.

NICHOLAS JOHNSON SAID, 'ALL TELEVISION IS EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION. THE QUESTION IS, "WHAT IS IT TEACHING?"

LAST SATURDAY MORNING 16-MILLION KIDS WERE WATCHING TV. WHAT THEY SAW WAS A LOT OF VIOLENCE AND A LOT OF COMMERCIALS. TODAY, AS ALL OF YOU KNOW, THERE IS A TREMENDOUS PUBLIC SWELL OF SENTIMENT OVER KID COMMERCIALS AND VIOLENCE ON TV. I NEEDN'T TELL YOU THAT THERE IS AN ACT OF VIOLENCE ON TV ON AN AVERAGE OF EVERY 14.2 MINUTES OR THAT THE AVERAGE PRESCHOOLER WATCHES 20,000 COMMERCIALS A YEAR.

BUT WHAT CONCERNS ME MORE THAN THE OBVIOUS VIOLENT ACTS AND COMMERCIALS IS WHAT THOSE CHILDREN WATCHED IN BETWEEN. DR. ALBERTA SIEGEL SAID IT BEST, "MOST TV AND ESPECIALLY KID'S PROGRAMS PERPETUATE AN OUTDATED SOCIAL SYSTEM AND OFFER A SIMPLISTIC INTERPRETATION OF AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX WORLD. CHARACTERS ARE ONE-DIMENSIONAL, LACKING THE EMOTIONS AND MOTIVATIONS THAT WOULD GIVE MEANING TO THEIR ACTIONS."

THE MODELING THEORY OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR BEING PROMOTED BY VIOLENCE ON TELEVISION NOT ONLY CONCERNS ME BUT, I BELIEVE, POINTS TO MORE SERIOUS MODELING IMPLICATIONS.

IF WE KNOW TELEVISION IS POWERFUL ENOUGH TO MOVE PEOPLE TO ACTS OF VIOLENCE. IF WE KNOW TELEVISION IS POWERFUL ENOUGH TO SELL MILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF PRODUCTS EACH YEAR. HOW CAN WE BE SO NAIVE AS TO BELIEVE IT IS NOT MOLDING A NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS THAT IS LADEN WITH 19th CENTURY VALUES & STEREOTYPICAL CHARACTERIZATIONS OF REALITY?

THERE ARE MORE TELEVISION SETS IN AMERICA THAN TOILETS, PARDON THE COMPARISON. 97% OF ALL U.S. HOMES HAVE ONE OR MORE TV SETS AND THE AVERAGE HOME HAS ITS TV SET GOING 6 HRS. AND 56 MIN. PER DAY. THE AVERAGE 18-YEAR-OLD HAS EXPERIENCED ONE-AND-ONE-HALF TIMES MORE TELEVISION THAN FORMAL EDUCATION. OVER TV THAT YOUNGSTER WILL HAVE WITNESSED SOME 18,000 MURDERS AND SEEN MORE THAN 350,000 COMMERCIALS.

THE AVERAGE AMERICAN WATCHES ABOUT 1200 HOURS OF TV EACH YEAR, YET READS BOOKS FOR ONLY FIVE HOURS PER YEAR. GALLUP'S RESEARCH SHOWS THAT MORE THAN HALF OF US HAVE NEVER READ A HARDBOUND OR PAPERBACK BOOK, EXCEPT FOR THE BIBLE AND TEXTBOOKS. FROM AGE 2 TO AGE 65 THE AVERAGE AMERICAN TV VIEWER WILL WATCH OVER 3,000 DAYS OF TV. THAT'S ROUGHLY NINE FULL YEARS OF THEIR LIFE!

DR. 'S GERBNER AND GROSS IN PSYCHOLOGY TODAY SAID, "TELEVISION BOTH PRECEDES LITERACY AND INCREASINGLY PREEMPTS IT".

PEOPLE ARE LULLED BY THE COMFORT OF THEIR TV ENVIRONMENT INTO A NEAR CATATONIC BLUR OF DOTS ON A SCREEN. THEY HAVEN'T BEEN TAUGHT HOW TO WATCH TV SO THEIR PASSIVE OBSERVATIONS OF THE TV IMAGES TAKE ON A REALITY OF THEIR OWN.

WE, AS EDUCATORS, HAVE CONSIDERED TELEVISION AS ONLY AN IRRITANT, NOT A NATURAL RESOURCE. PAUL HOUTS, EDITOR OF THE NATIONAL ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL WROTE, "TELEVISION MAY BE THE MOST POWERFUL, AND MOST NEGLECTED EDUCATIONAL FORCE OUTSIDE SCHOOL....."

AS EDUCATORS, WE MUST BE MADE AWARE THAT OUR STUDENTS, SINCE THEY'VE NOT BEEN TAUGHT HOW TO WATCH TV, ARE USING THEIR ELECTRONIC, PRIME-TIME CURRICULUM AS A PERCEPTION OF REALITY.

"AMONG THE PROBLEMS OF TELEVISION AS AN EXPERIENCE, COHEN ARGUES, IS THAT IT PROMPTS A PASSIVE OBSERVATION OF AN IMAGE (AND OFTEN A DISTORTED ONE) OF REALITY AT A TIME WHEN THE YOUNG CHILD NEEDS A SENSORY CONTACT WITH REALITY ITSELF."

SOME SAY OUR SOCIETY USES TV TO ESCAPE FROM REALITY AND IS ASTUTE ENOUGH TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REALITY AND FANTASY. I QUESTION THAT. IN ITS FIVE YEARS ON PRIME TIME, "MARCUS WELBY, M.D." RECEIVED MORE THAN 250,000 LETTERS, MOST FOR LEGITIMATE MEDICAL ADVICE. UNLIKE THE MOVIES WHERE WE REMEMBER CLARK GABLE AS

A STAR AND NOT JUST RHETT BUTLER OR ^{WE REMEMBER} MARLON BRANDO OR ELIZABETH TAYLOR, PEOPLE CONSISTENTLY REFER TO TV STARS AS THE CHARACTERS THEY PLAY. HENRY WINKLER, SHERMAN HEMSLEY, LINDSAY WAGNER OR CLORIS LEACHMAN DON'T RING TOO MANY BELLS UNTIL THEY BECOME "THE FONZ", GEORGE JEFFERSON, "THE BIONIC WOMAN", OR "PHYLLIS".

IF WE USE TELEVISION AS OUR BAROMETER OF REALITY, WHAT WOULD WE THINK ABOUT THE WORLD AROUND US?

DR. GEORGE GERBNER SAYS WE WOULD LEARN THE ROLE OF VICTIM, "AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF VIOLENCE AS A SOCIAL REALITY WE MUST LEARN TO LIVE WITH...OR FLEE FROM." HIS RESEARCH CONCLUDED, "HEAVY VIEWERS ARE LESS TRUSTFUL OF THEIR FELLOW CITIZENS AND MORE FEARFUL OF THE REAL WORLD." IF WE THOUGHT TV REPRESENTED REALITY OR EVEN A FICTIONAL DEPICTION OF REALITY WE WOULD BELIEVE:

- THERE ARE FOUR TIMES AS MANY MEN AS WOMEN
- MEN ARE MOSTLY SINGLE, MIDDLE AND UPPER-CLASS WHITE AMERICANS IN THEIR 20's OR 30's.
- WHILE ONLY ONE OUT OF EVERY THREE MALE LEADS INTENDS TO OR HAS EVER BEEN MARRIED, TWO OUT OF EVERY THREE FEMALE LEADS ARE EITHER MARRIED, EXPECTED TO MARRY, OR INVOLVED IN SOME ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP
- MORALITY AND JUSTICE ARE BLACK AND WHITE ISSUES AND ONLY TAKE 30 TO 60 MINUTES TO BE DEALT WITH
- WE WOULD BELIEVE THAT THE WORK FORCE IS 40% PROFESSIONAL AND MANAGERIAL JOBS, HELD ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY BY WHITE MALES AND WE WOULD BELIEVE THAT 20% OF THE WORK FORCE IS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT
- WE WOULD BELIEVE THAT HALF OF THE POPULATION IS INVOLVED IN SOME VIOLENCE AND ABOUT ONE-TENTH IN KILLING. ON TV ACTS OF VIOLENCE OCCUR ON AN AVERAGE OF ONE EVERY 14.2 MINUTES AND A KILLING EVERY 45 MINUTES. THE REALITY IS MUCH LESS EXCITING.

IF WE LOOKED TO COMMERCIALS, OUR IMAGE IS EVEN MORE STEREOTYPICAL AND OPPRESSIVE:

- 1972 DOMINICK AND RAUCH STUDY

- 75% OF ALL ADS USING FEMALES WERE FOR PRODUCTS FOUND IN THE KITCHEN BATHROOM
- 38% OF ALL FEMALES IN TV ADS WERE SHOWN INSIDE THE HOME, COMPARED TO 14% OF THE MALES
- 71% OF WOMEN IN ADS WERE 20-35 YRS. OLD, ONLY 43% OF MEN IN THIS CATEGORY
- 56% OF WOMEN IN ADS WERE JUDGED TO BE HOUSEWIVES
- 43 DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONS WERE CODED FOR MEN, 18 FOR WOMEN
- OF 946 ADS WITH VOICE-OVERS, ONLY 6% USED A FEMALE VOICE

TV IS NO KINDER TO MEN IN THE REAL WORLD, EITHER. BORDWICK & SCHUMANN DID A STUDY ON MALE ROLES ON TV AND CONCLUDED THIS WAY:

"THE IMAGE OF THE AMERICAN MAN IN TV COMMERCIALS AS MUSCULAR, KNOWLEDGEABLE, DOMINATING, INDEPENDENT, SEXY, COSMOPOLITAN, ATHLETIC, AUTHORITATIVE AND AGGRESSIVE EXISTS ONLY WHEN HE IS SEEN AWAY FROM HIS FAMILY. IN EMBARRASSING CONTRAST THE AMERICAN FATHER AND HUSBAND IS PORTRAYED AS PASSIVE, STUPID, INFANTILE AND EMASCULATED....BUT OUTSIDE THE HOUSE TROUBLE IS WHAT HE'S LOOKING FOR.

I AM CONCERNED ABOUT MODELING. IT DOESN'T APPEAR AS IF COMMERCIAL PROGRAMS ARE GOING TO CHANGE SIGNIFICANTLY. NOR WILL WE SEEMINGLY, BE WATCHING FEWER HOURS OF TELEVISION. SO WHY NOT TRY TO INCREASE THE CHANCES OF OUR CHILDREN AND OUR SOCIETY OF GAINING SOMETHING CONSTRUCTIVE OUT OF THE TIME SPENT WITH THE MEDIUM.

WITH OTHER MEDIA AND MOST OTHER HUMAN ENDEAVORS WE ATTEMPT TO USE SOME DISCRETION. WE TEND TO HAVE SOME MECHANISMS FOR QUESTIONING THEIR VALIDITY. IRONICALLY, WITH TELEVISION PEOPLE TEND TO DISTRUST REALITY NOT TELEVISION
(CUBEF5KV)

I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT COMMERCIAL TELEVISION IS THE ONLY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM KNOWN TO MAN THAT TRIES TO PLEASE ALL OF THE PEOPLE ALL OF THE TIME. BY DEFINITION, THEREFORE, IT MUST FIND ITS LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR.

IT MUST PORTRAY PEOPLE, THINGS AND SITUATIONS IN BIZARRELY OVERGENERALIZED STEREOTYPICAL AND UNREAL WAYS. TELEVISION HAS A REALITY OF ITS OWN. WITH 30 and 60 MINUTE BLOCKS OF PROGRAM TIME AND THE INCREDIBLE 20, 30 or 60 SECONDS FOR COMMERCIALS IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO EVER EXPECT ANYTHING BEYOND GROSS GENERALIZATION. WOMEN = HOUSEWIVES, MEN = WORK, BLACKS = GHETTOS, INDIANS DON'T EXIST, CRIME = PUNISHMENT, DEODORANT = SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE. THESE, UNFORTUNATELY, ARE THE REALITIES OF COMMERCIAL TV.

CONTRARY TO THE WAY WE USE IT, TV IS JUST ONE OF A VARIETY OF MEDIA. WE KNOW HOW TO USE THE OTHERS AND SO WE DON'T DEMAND AS MUCH FROM THEM. NOT ALL BOOKS THAT ARE PUBLISHED EACH YEAR, OR EVER, ARE GOOD. IN FACT, ONLY A FRACTION OF THEM ARE. THERE ARE GOOD MOVIES AND BAD MOVIES; VIOLENT MOVIES AND NON-VIOLENT MOVIES; BUT WE SEEM TO KNOW THAT MOVIES ARE FANTASY. WE RATE MOVIES AND THEN DECIDE TO SEE OR NOT SEE THEM. WITH TELEVISION, WE WATCH IT AND THEN DECIDE TO RATE IT OR NOT RATE IT.

I SINCERELY BELIEVE THE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR ARRESTING THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF TELEVISION LIES WITH PARENTS AND EDUCATORS. WE MUST TEACH PEOPLE HOW TO WATCH TV AND HOW TO USE IT. WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT TELEVISION, LIKE A DEPARTMENT STORE, OFFERS A GREAT VARIETY OF PRODUCTS FOR A GREATLY VARIED BODY OF CONSUMERS. WE MUST EDUCATE THE TV CONSUMER ON HOW TO SHOP ON THIS TUBE OF DOTS. IT WOULD BE LUDICROUS TO CRITICIZE DEPARTMENT STORES FOR SELLING CHEAP PRODUCTS IN THEIR BASEMENT OR TO INSIST THAT THE TOY COUNTERS BE REPLACED BY BOOK COUNTERS. BUT THEN WE HAVE LEARNED HOW TO USE A DEPARTMENT STORE. WE MUST LEARN HOW TO WATCH TV. (Books, 6 hours a day)

THE STEREOTYPICAL DEPICTION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES, OCCUPATIONS, WOMEN AND, YES, EVEN MEN BOTH OFFENDS AND FRIGHTENS ME. IF KIDS ARE LEARNING FROM TV, WHAT CONCEPTS VALUES AND BEHAVIORS ARE THEY LEARNING THAT WILL MAKE LIFE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BETTER?

WHAT ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS IS TV SHAPING? WHAT DOES TV DO FOR THEIR SELF-CONCEPT? TV COMMERCIALS ARE PREMISED ON FEAR, PROGRAMMING PREMISED ON PLASTIC, OUT-MODED AND GENERALIZED MODELS. WE MUST UNDERSTAND TV IS AS MUCH A SOCIALIZING FORCE AS FAMILY, CHURCH AND SCHOOL.

DR. SIEGEL SUCCINCTLY SAID, "ONE HALLMARK OF A CIVILIZED SOCIETY IS THE PROTECTION IT OFFERS ITS CHILDREN. IN HARSH, PUNITIVE, AND NON-CARING SOCIETIES, CHILDREN ARE REGARDED AS MINATURE ADULTS, LEFT TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES DESPITE THE FACT THEY LACK THE INTELLIGENCE AND SOPHISTICATION NEEDED TO DEAL WITH THE ADULT WORLD.....

"INADVERTANTLY, BY BRINGING THE TV SET INTO THE HOME AND BY ASSIGNING THE PUBLIC AIRWAVES TO EXPLOITATION BY PRIVATE INTERESTS, WE HAVE CAST AMERICAN CHILD VIEWERS INTO THE ROLE OF MINATURE ADULTS.....IN OUR OWN GENERATION, AMERICA HAS LAUNCHED A NEW AND POWERFUL AGENCY FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIALIZATION.....AN AGENCY THAT IS OPERATED BY HUCKSTERS WHOSE DISREGARD FOR CHILDREN'S WELFARE APPEARS TO BE EXCEEDED ONLY BY THEIR IGNORANCE OF CHILDREN'S NEEDS".